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Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the fortieth submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2258 (2015) and paragraph 5 of resolution 2332 (2016), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on the data available to United Nations agencies and from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as from other Syrian and open sources. Data from United Nations agencies on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 to 31 May 2017.

Box 1
Key points in May 2017

(1) On 4 May, Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation and Turkey signed a memorandum on the creation of four de-escalation areas, where hostilities between the conflicting parties are to cease (including the use of aerial assets). It aims to facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and create conditions for the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

(2) Only three inter-agency cross-line convoys were deployed in May. Of those, only one, a convoy to Duma on 2 May, deployed to a besieged area.

(3) Evacuations out of the Wa'r district in Homs city were completed on 21 May. Since a local agreement between Government and non-State armed opposition groups to evacuate reached on 13 March, a total of 13 rounds of evacuation took place; around 20,000 persons left the district, with most going to Aleppo and Idlib.

(4) The Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by the international counter-ISIL coalition led by the United States of America, continued the advance towards Raqqah city amid heavy air strikes and increased ground fighting, reaching an area within five km of Raqqah city by 31 May.

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(5) On 7 May, the United Nations resumed life-saving humanitarian assistance at the berm between the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan with a second aid distribution cycle. Throughout the month of May, food and essential items have been delivered to approximately 27,600 individuals in the Rukban community in preparation for the summer months.

II. Major developments

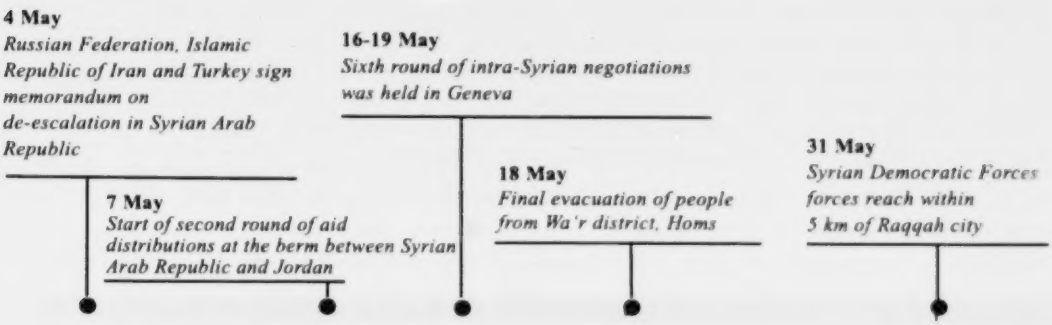
3. At a high-level meeting convened in Astana on 3 and 4 May, Iran (Islamic Republic of) the Russian Federation and Turkey signed a memorandum on the creation of four de-escalation areas, where hostilities between the conflicting parties are to cease (including the use of aerial assets). One of the aims of the memorandum is to facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and create conditions for the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. At the same time, the fight against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Nusrah Front is to continue both within and outside the de-escalation areas. The four areas identified are (a) Idlib governorate and certain parts of neighbouring Ladhiqiyah, Hama and Aleppo governorate, (b) parts of northern rural Homs governorate, (c) eastern Ghutah in Rif Dimashq, and (d) certain parts of southern Syria (Dar'a and Qunaytirah governorates). An expert-level joint working group on de-escalation was formed among the guarantors to map the de-escalation areas, separate the moderate armed opposition groups from terrorist groups, and resolve remaining operational issues. The joint working group met in Ankara on 18 May and again on 24 and 25 May.

4. Following the agreement of the memorandum, on 4 May, violence decreased in the areas likely to be included in de-escalation areas. Hostilities in Dar'a, despite its status as a de-escalation area, increased during the month. In addition, some military activities continued to be reported inside and outside de-escalation areas throughout the reporting period. Air strikes and artillery shelling were reported in the governorates of Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Hama, Dar'a, Qunaytirah, Aleppo, Idlib, Homs and Ladhiqiyah.

5. At the same time as some areas saw a de-escalation, anti-ISIL operations appear to have intensified in eastern parts of the country. Pro-government forces, non-State armed opposition groups, Syrian Democratic Forces led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units and the United States-led international coalition to counter ISIL all continued their offensives against ISIL targets in Raqqah, Homs and Dayr al-Zawr governorates. On 18 May, the United States military struck a convoy of Government forces and allied militias that was moving towards Tanf, near the Syrian Arab Republic's border with Iraq and Jordan. United States officials described this as a defensive action while the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic strongly criticized it as a violation of its sovereignty.

6. Local agreements between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and non-State armed opposition groups in besieged areas continued to be reached and implemented throughout the month of May. The United Nations has not been involved in the negotiations, agreements or subsequent evacuations surrounding these local agreements. Some of the initiatives raise concerns owing to the reported absence of adequate consultation with the civilian populations living in areas covered by such agreements and the reported lack of adequate safety and security guarantees and procedures to protect the rights of those affected.

Figure I
Key dates in May 2017


4 May
Russian Federation, Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey sign memorandum on de-escalation in Syrian Arab Republic
7 May
Start of second round of aid distributions at the berm between Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan
16-19 May
Sixth round of intra-Syrian negotiations was held in Geneva
18 May
Final evacuation of people from Wa'r district, Homs
31 May
Syrian Democratic Forces forces reach within 5 km of Raqqah city

7. Following a local agreement between the Government and non-State armed opposition groups in the Wa'r district in Homs city on 13 March, 13 evacuations were conducted, with a total of 19,822 persons evacuated from Wa'r district to Aleppo and Idlib governorates and to northern rural Homs during the period between 13 March and 21 May. After completion of those evacuations on 21 May, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic assumed full control of the district. Since the conclusion of the evacuations, a few dozen evacuees have returned from Jarabulus to Wa'r, citing dire humanitarian conditions.

Box 2
The berm between the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan

(1) Since 2012, small numbers of Syrians have fled to Rukban and Hadalat along Jordan's north-eastern border with the Syrian Arab Republic (referred to as the berm). More Syrians began seeking to cross into north-eastern Jordan around September 2015, as aerial bombardments intensified across the country; pressure peaked at the berm in May 2016, when over 100,000 people were estimated to be amassing between the two locations. There are currently an estimated 60,000 people present in the area.

(2) Following an attack on the border guard post at Rukban on 21 June 2016, the Government of Jordan sealed the border and declared the entire north-eastern border region as a closed military zone with no civilian access. Supplies of water continued largely uninterrupted, with the provision of an average of 13.2 l per person per day at Rukban. In August 2016, a one-off delivery of humanitarian assistance was agreed upon, delivered by crane. Following further discussions, the resumption of the delivery of humanitarian assistance was permitted in November 2016, through a newly set-up distribution area. That distribution was completed on 12 January 2017.

(3) Planning for the next cycle of aid distributions was met with a series of logistical, administrative and security challenges and did not resume until 7 May, when the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance restarted at the berm. Throughout the month of May, food and essential items have been delivered to approximately 27,600 individuals in Rukban in preparation for the summer months. The construction of a new water station and pipe network has been completed and is scheduled to become operational in the coming weeks.

(4) In addition, a United Nations health clinic set up in December 2016 continues to receive and treat the most vulnerable medical cases, as well as assisting with referrals inside Jordan. Since its opening, and up to the end of May, 4,093 consultations have been conducted at the clinic and 236 cases were referred to hospitals in Jordan for further specialized treatment. Furthermore, between 27 May and 2 June, an emergency vaccination campaign took place, covering 10,592 children. The number of patients admitted for services at the health clinic was reduced in recent weeks owing to increased security concerns.

(5) Planning is now under way for the next cycle of aid distributions, after the Eid celebrations at the end of Ramadan.

8. Local agreements were also reached between the Government and non-State armed opposition groups in eastern Damascus, adjacent to eastern Ghutah (which is one of the four de-escalation areas), in Barzah on 7 May, in Tishrin on 11 May and in Qabun on 13 May. Between 8 and 29 May, 9,774 people were evacuated from those districts to Idlib. The Government subsequently assumed full control of those areas. On 8 May, around 70 persons, including 20 patients, were evacuated from al-Yarmouk camp in southern Damascus to Idlib. In exchange, on the same day, five patients and 14 family members were evacuated from the besieged towns of Fu'ah and Kafraya in the northern countryside of Idlib.

9. The Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by the United States of America-led international counter-ISIL coalition, continued their advance towards Raqqah city amidst heavy air strikes and increased ground fighting in the western and eastern countryside of Raqqah. By 31 May, the Forces were within five km of Raqqah city. The Forces' advances towards Raqqah city displaced an estimated 100,000 people during the month of May. As the fighting draws closer to Raqqah city, vital civilian infrastructure continues to be affected, with reports of attacks on education facilities.

10. Many of the displaced are moving north of Raqqah city or towards the Ayn Isa transit centre and further on to other camps. There have been concerns over the action taken by the local authorities at the transit site, where displaced people are reportedly having their identification documents taken from them while they are being processed at the camps and not being granted freedom of movement. The United Nations and its partners are responding to provide humanitarian assistance to people displaced to those areas north of Raqqah city, where access is allowed.

11. Fighting in early May to the east of Tabaqah has also resulted in displacement, although many who were displaced have started to return. It is estimated that about 35,000 people are currently residing in Tabaqah town, compared to 80,000 before the fighting. Local authorities have prevented newly displaced persons arriving from the north from entering the city, citing security concerns. Many are staying in tents or open areas outside of the town. Humanitarian partners are responding with food distributions, but protection concerns, relating to mine contamination in particular, remain high.

12. On 1 and 2 May, extremist groups attacked the Rajm al-Salibi site in Hasakah governorate, near the border with Iraq, resulting in 22 deaths and 35 injuries. Rajm al-Salibi is used as a screening site for Iraqi refugees and Syrian internally displaced persons before their relocation to Al-Hol camp for internally displaced persons.

13. Following the progress achieved towards de-escalation in early May, my Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, convened the Syrian parties for a sixth round of intra-Syrian negotiations, held in Geneva from 16 to 19 May. During that round, the Special Envoy initiated technical consultations to more deeply explore

legal and constitutional issues relating to a political transition. Technical consultations were held between experts from the Office of the Special Envoy and experts designated by the negotiating delegations to the intra-Syrian talks. In parallel, the Special Envoy engaged with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board on modalities for the technical consultations; after the talks, the Special Envoy held intensive discussions with civil society organizations, from 22 to 24 May.

Protection

14. Air and ground-based strikes continued to kill and injure civilians in significant numbers. As in the past, the high level of civilian casualties remains a strong indication that violations of the prohibition on launching indiscriminate attacks and of the principles of proportionality and precaution in and against the effects of attack are ongoing. Children have been particularly affected by the fighting and, in some incidents, constituted the majority of the casualties.

15. Fighting continued to affect civilian infrastructure, including medical personnel and facilities, schools, markets and places of worship. Based on information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), civilian casualties in possible violation of international humanitarian law occurred in various governorates (see annex). OHCHR documented alleged incidents by many parties to the conflict, including Government forces and their allies, non-State armed opposition groups and Security Council-designated terrorist groups.

16. The United States Department of Defense publicly confirmed that in May, the United States-led coalition carried out 585 strikes against ISIL targets in the governorates of Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah, Homs and Raqqah. More than two thirds of those strikes were reported to have been in Raqqah governorate (with the vicinity of Raqqah city hit every day of the month), and over a quarter in the governorate of Dayr al-Zawr. On 25 May, the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) announced that the body would become a full member of the international coalition, adding that NATO surveillance planes would help improve airspace management.

17. The Russian Federation publicly confirmed that they conducted strikes in May, with the Ministry of Defence stating in a 31 May briefing that they had fired cruise missiles on ISIL objects in the vicinity of Tadmur (Palmyra). The Ministry reportedly briefed the media that they had also carried out air strikes on ISIL targets travelling from Raqqah city to Tadmur (Palmyra).

18. The United Nations and health partners received credible reports of eight attacks that affected medical facilities and personnel throughout the month of May. Of those, five have been verified to date. Of the five verified attacks, four occurred on health-care facilities providing trauma treatment in rural Damascus, Homs, Hama and Dar'a. Collectively, the attacks resulted in the killing of at least two medical staff and wounding of at least 18 people, including three medical staff. One attack was registered against the Ibn Sina psychiatric hospital in Rural Damascus. Some departments of the hospital were partially damaged and four female patients were killed, while 17 patients and one nurse were injured.

19. Educational facilities continued to be affected as well. On 18 May 2017, ISIL fighters entered and used the Aqarib elementary school, 15 km north-east of Salamiyah city, Hama governorate, during a clash with Government forces.

Humanitarian access

Box 3
Key points for humanitarian access

(1) With a convoy to Duma on 2 May, one besieged area was reached through United Nations inter-agency cross-line operations in May, beyond Dayr al-Zawr (reached through airdrops). A total of two inter-agency convoys deployed in May reached two hard-to-reach areas, namely, Wadi Barada on 6 May and Jayrud on 22 May. Removal of medical supplies from the convoys remains a major challenge, with supplies sufficient for 90,827 people removed in May.

(2) As of the end of May, the United Nations had reached some 266,750 people under the April/May convoy plan, which constitutes 25 per cent of the 1,066,650 beneficiaries originally requested to be reached. Other inter-agency convoys could not proceed owing to a lack of approvals, including the lack of facilitation letters by the Syrian authorities; fighting and insecurity; and other restrictions after initial approvals.

(3) During the reporting period, some 1,243,572 beneficiaries were assisted by the United Nations and partners via cross-border operations from Turkey and Jordan.

(4) The United Nations and partners continue to respond to the humanitarian impact of fighting and insecurity in north-eastern Syria. While they are reaching hundreds of thousands in these governorates, restrictions by local authorities on the ground continued to hinder response efforts in May, including by causing difficulties in getting supplies to the area.

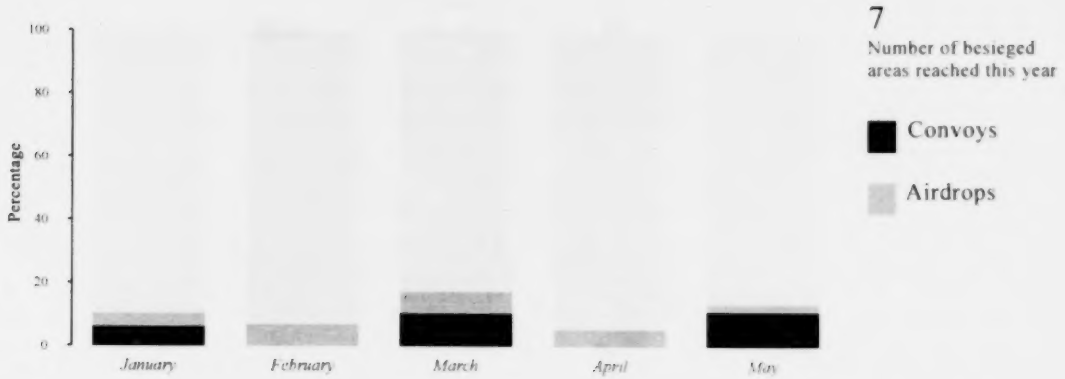
20. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need remained extremely challenging in many areas of the country as a result of active conflict, shifting conflict lines, administrative impediments and deliberate restrictions on the movement of people and goods by the parties to the conflict.

21. Access for the United Nations to those living in besieged and hard-to-reach locations remains a critical concern. Three United Nations inter-agency convoys were dispatched to besieged and hard-to-reach locations in May (see table 4 for the list of inter-agency convoys in May). Convoys to other besieged and hard-to-reach areas, including those approved under the April-May inter-agency convoy plan, were unable to proceed as a result of fighting and insecurity, administrative delays by the Syrian authorities and restrictions applied by non-State armed opposition groups.

22. During the reporting period, United Nations agencies also undertook single-agency cross-line deliveries to hard-to-reach locations or reached those locations through their regular programmes. Meanwhile, both international and Syrian non-governmental organizations continued to undertake needs assessments and provide support (including medical, education, psychosocial and protection services) in besieged and hard-to-reach locations, under extremely challenging circumstances and in accordance with humanitarian principles.

Figure II

United Nations inter-agency cross-line humanitarian operations: percentage of people reached each month in besieged areas, including via airdrops to Dayr al-Zawr city



23. A combination of insecurity, deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties to the conflict continued to prevent aid delivery. The majority of United Nations agencies and the majority of United Nations partners continue to be unable to access populations in need in areas of the country controlled by ISIL, as all plans to deliver assistance to these areas have been suspended as a result of their inability to work independently and monitor activities. This has prevented the United Nations and its humanitarian partners from reaching Raqqah city and most of Dayr al-Zawr governorate, as well as pockets of northern rural Aleppo, southern rural Hasakah and north-western rural Hama.

24. Meanwhile, restrictions continue to be imposed by non-State armed opposition groups and other local actors. For example, humanitarian organizations have reported challenges in obtaining approvals from local authorities in Kurdish-controlled areas in the north-east of the country, causing delays to programming. This included the local authorities denying requests by the World Food Programme (WFP) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) to deliver assistance to people in Hasakah governorate, as the authorities requested that all aid be redirected to support the response in Raqqah governorate. As a result, WFP was only able to deliver food for 18,750 people out of the 192,500 people they had planned to reach.

25. At the same time, humanitarian access for Turkey-based cross-border partners into Idlib governorate is also reportedly continuing to face more challenges, as non-State armed opposition groups, as well as groups designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council, are placing demands on non-governmental organizations operating in the governorate. Those organizations face registration requirements and/or are being requested to provide information on staffing, logistics and finances. The demands are not being applied consistently and have led some organizations to scale down or even temporarily suspend their operations, pending a resolution of such issues.

Figure III
United Nations inter-agency cross-line humanitarian operations (May 2017)

26. Life-saving and life-sustaining medical items sufficient for over 90,000 treatments were removed from convoys in May. The details of the treatments and supplies removed are given in table 2. Additional medical supplies were scheduled to be delivered as part of the monthly inter-agency convoy plan, but only three convoys were able to proceed. Furthermore, since the beginning of 2017, the World Health Organization has submitted nine single-agency requests to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to access 14 locations in five governorates. The Government approved two requests, six requests remain unanswered and one request has been rejected.

Table 2
Medical supplies removed from humanitarian convoys in May 2017

Location	*Number of treatments*	*Type of supplies*
Jayrud	18 151	Pneumonia type A and B kits, intravenous therapy used for fluid replacement, latex examination gloves, anticholinergic and antispasmodic drugs, bronchodilators, different types of antibiotics, anti-inflammatory treatments and synthetic corticosteroids
Wadi Barada	53 948	Pneumonia type A and B kits, bronchodilators, antibiotic and analgesic treatments, and antipyretic drugs

Location	*Number of treatments*	*Type of supplies*
Duma	18 628	Pneumonia type A and B kits, defibrillator, clear water kit with filter, anti-epileptic drugs, sterilizers, basic X-ray, ventilator for adults, intravenous therapy used for fluid replacement, anti-inflammatory treatments, synthetic corticosteroids, anticholinergic and antispasmodic drugs, and latex examination gloves

27. The United Nations inter-agency convoy plan for April and May requested access to 28 locations, including besieged areas, aiming to reach 1,066,650 people. Access to 764,950 beneficiaries was approved, representing 71.7 per cent out of a total of 1,066,650 beneficiaries to whom access had been requested. Nine locations were approved in full, while 13 locations were approved with either a lower number of beneficiaries in need than those identified by the United Nations, or without the number of beneficiaries who might be reached having been specified. Access was denied to six locations, comprising over 132,000 people. As of the end of May, the team had reached some 266,750 people with six convoys, representing 28 per cent of the people requested in the plan. Convoys to other approved locations in the plan could not be dispatched in April or May owing to non-approval by the Syrian authorities at the outset, as well as insecurity and fighting and delays with the issuance of facilitation letters in some instances.

28. Individual agencies continued to submit requests for single-agency convoys during the reporting period. For example, during the month of May, WFP submitted 1,795 official requests to obtain facilitation letters to transport food assistance to targeted locations across the country, the vast majority of which are for regularly accessible areas. Of those, three requests did not receive approval or response from the relevant authorities, preventing the delivery of food assistance for 10,000 people. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) submitted requests for 42 facilitation letters for the movement of non-food items and livelihood kits within the Syrian Arab Republic, mostly to areas accessible under regular programming. 40 of those were approved, while two were rejected for security reasons. The United Nations Population Fund in Syria reached 12,874 people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, with protection support.

29. The Nusaybin/Qamishli crossing in Hasakah governorate has been temporarily closed by the Turkish authorities since 27 December 2015 because of security concerns. This has interrupted land deliveries of United Nations humanitarian assistance to Hasakah governorate through borders surrounding the governorate. Hasakah governorate also remains largely inaccessible by road for United Nations agencies from within the Syrian Arab Republic owing to insecurity and the presence of ISIL along the routes. However, the road from Aleppo through Manbij to Hasakah has reopened for commercial traffic. While discussions continue to identify a land route for life-saving United Nations aid, the United Nations continues airlifts from Damascus to Qamishli airport to deliver multisectoral assistance.

Humanitarian response

30. In May, United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need through all modalities from within the Syrian Arab Republic and across its borders (see table 3). In addition to the United Nations and partners, non-governmental organizations also continued to deliver life-saving assistance to people in need. The Government continued to provide basic services to

areas under its control as well as in many areas beyond its control. Local authorities in many areas controlled by non-State armed opposition groups also continued to provide services when possible.

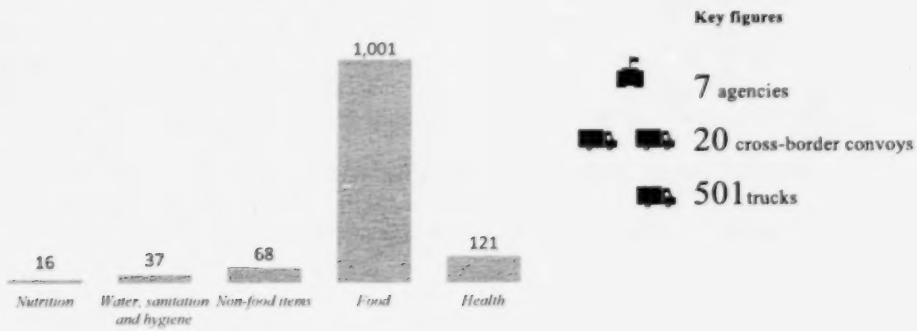
Table 3
Number of people reached by the United Nations and other organizations in May 2017

Organization	*Number of people reached*
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	47 688
International Organization for Migration	1 807 515
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	297 046
United Nations Children's Fund	>4 500 000
United Nations Development Programme	1 811 402
United Nations Population Fund	267 787
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	198 838
World Food Programme	3 650 000
World Health Organization	1 018 973

31. During the reporting period, cross-border deliveries continued from Turkey and Jordan into the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of resolutions 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (see figure IV for details). In line with those Security Council resolutions, the United Nations notified the Syrian authorities in advance of each shipment, including content, destination and number of beneficiaries. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations, monitoring 501 trucks used in 20 convoys by seven United Nations entities in May, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying the Syrian authorities after each shipment. The Mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation with the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

Figure IV
Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners per cluster through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, May 2017

(Thousands)



32. Inter-agency convoys completed in May 2017 are listed in table 4 below. In total, the United Nations undertook three inter-agency convoys during the reporting month, all part of the April and May inter-agency convoy plan. In May, WFP carried

out 20 high-altitude airdrop rotations, airdropping food rations sufficient for 51,475 people as well as supplies from other humanitarian actors. In May, the logistics cluster conducted 53 airlift rotations to Qamishli, airlifting a total of 1,516 tons of WFP food and other supplies on behalf of other humanitarian actors. This enabled WFP to provide food assistance for 34,980 people in parts of Hasakah and Raqqah governorates.

Table 4
Inter-agency cross-line humanitarian convoys: May 2017

Date	*Location*	*Requested target (number of beneficiaries)*	*Number of beneficiaries reached*	*Type of assistance*
2 May	Duma	75 000	70 000	Multisectoral
6 May	Wadi Barada	30 000	30 000	Multisectoral
22 May	Jayrud, Nasriyeh and Atanah	44 250	44 250	Multisectoral

33. The second cross-border polio campaign was conducted from 29 April to 11 May 2017, targeting children under the age of 5 in accessible areas in Idlib, Ladhiqiyah, Aleppo and Homs. The total number of children vaccinated by bivalent oral polio vaccine was 659,253. The accelerated implementation of routine immunization campaign, in collaboration with Médecins sans frontières Spain, began on 13 May in Aleppo, for 10 days. A total of 81,736 children were vaccinated. A national vaccination campaign against measles was also conducted from inside the Syrian Arab Republic during the period from 21 to 25 May, reaching over 1.5 million children in 12 governorates. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) vaccinated 8,560 Palestine refugee children against measles through its clinics as part of this campaign.

34. During May, UNICEF provided nutrition services for over 260,000 children and pregnant and lactating mothers through regular programming and cross-border and inter-agency cross-line operations. Nutrition services included preventive, therapeutic and supplementary interventions, including screening and treatment for cases of moderate and severe acute malnutrition.

35. For the fourth consecutive year, UNRWA supported 297 grade 9, and 82 grade 12 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and Syrian students from Lebanon and Yarmouk to take their national examinations, on 14 May and 30 May, respectively. During the two-week examination period, UNRWA provided the young refugees with lodging and food, medical consultations, cash assistance, study sessions, psychosocial support and counselling, and recreational activities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is also providing support to children from hard-to-reach and besieged areas in order for them to sit their national examinations. A total of 4,657 children coming from hard-to-reach areas in Hama, Hasakah and Ladhiqiyah were supported by UNICEF with education bursaries to sit for the grade 9 national examinations.

36. Throughout the month, the Russian Federation sent information bulletins to the United Nations from the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, which outlined the provision of bilateral relief assistance. Other Member States also continued to provide bilateral and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Visas and registrations

37. A total of 34 new visa requests were submitted to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in May. Of those, 13 applications were approved, 1 was rejected and 20 remain pending. A total of 18 new visa requests submitted in earlier months were approved in May, while 2 were rejected. A total of 57 visa renewal requests were submitted in May, of which 36 requests were approved and 21 remain pending. A further 19 visa renewals submitted in earlier months were also approved, while 2 remain pending.

38. A total of 21 international non-governmental organizations are registered with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to operate in the country. Four international non-governmental organizations are in the process of completing registration. Those organizations continued to face a series of administrative hurdles and restrictions that affect their ability to operate, including in gaining permission to undertake independent needs assessments. Some 217 national non-governmental organizations are authorized by the Syrian Arab Republic to partner with the United Nations.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

39. On 7 May, five improvised explosive devices were remotely detonated on the highway between Suwayda' and Damascus in the Lahithah area and damaged a civilian bus, causing a number of injuries. As a result, a mission by the Suwayda' field office of UNHCR, to Damascus, was postponed and all staff were advised to avoid using public transportation between Suwayda' and Damascus until further notice.

40. Since the start of the conflict, dozens of humanitarian workers have been killed, including 21 staff members of the United Nations, 17 of whom were UNRWA staff members, 65 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and eight staff members and volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. In addition, many staff members of international and national non-governmental organizations are reported to have been killed. A total of 29 United Nations staff members, including 1 UNDP staff member and 28 UNRWA staff members, are detained or currently missing.

III. Observations

41. The signature of the memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas on 4 May created an opportunity to improve the situation of many civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic. While the exact boundaries have not been identified, the de-escalation areas include all besieged areas, except Dayr al-Zawr (besieged by ISIL). It is critical that de-escalation succeeds and that we see a sustained calm in these areas. I am mindful that the guarantors' efforts have resulted in a reduction of violence in the areas identified. This must be further expanded and should not lead to escalation of violence in other parts of the country. The creation of de-escalation areas must also result in a sustained increase in humanitarian access. Such an increase was not seen in May.

42. If implemented, the memorandum agreed on 4 May has the potential to solidify the 30 December 2016 ceasefire, facilitate unhindered humanitarian access to millions of civilians in the de-escalation areas and create an enabling environment for negotiations to achieve a political settlement of the Syrian conflict based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of June 2012. The

de-escalation areas could serve to build trust among the conflicting sides and prepare the ground for progress in the political negotiations.

43. The United Nations stands ready to support the guarantors in the implementation of the memorandum, with a view to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people and ensuring the implementation of the memorandum in line with relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian and human rights law. The establishment of the de-escalation areas should also be accompanied by other confidence-building measures, including, as a matter of priority, measures regarding the issue of detainees.

44. Despite the reduction in fighting in many areas following the agreement, I remain deeply troubled by the situation on the ground for many civilians who suffer from the ongoing conflict. Explosive weapons continue to be fired into populated areas, not only indiscriminately killing and injuring people, but also destroying and damaging vital infrastructure. I continue to reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court. I also call on all Member States to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

45. I am particularly concerned for those civilians who are affected by anti-ISIL operations, who face significant security and protection challenges from every direction, at home, and often face similar challenges again in displacement camps. All those conducting military operations in the Syrian Arab Republic must do so in compliance with international humanitarian law, in particular as it relates to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and must facilitate humanitarian access to allow aid to reach those in urgent need of life-saving assistance. All efforts must be made to include a humanitarian concept of operations in military planning.

46. Those living in besieged areas also continue to face dire circumstances, although the number of people in those areas has been further reduced through the implementation of local agreements. In many instances, the agreements, to which the United Nations is not a party, followed prolonged periods of heavy fighting and restricted humanitarian assistance, for years on end. Thousands of people left besieged areas in May after local agreements in Wa'r, Barzah and Qabun. Such local agreements do not appear to meet international standards or provide the necessary humanitarian safeguards. Further, those departing often move to areas in which civilians and civilian infrastructure continue to be regularly attacked. As I have said before, any evacuation of civilians must be safe, voluntary and to a place of their choosing. It is imperative that all those who are displaced through local agreements have the right of return as soon as the situation allows.

47. Ultimately, an end to the Syrian people's suffering can only be achieved through a political process that brings a lasting solution to the Syrian conflict. I welcome the steps taken in the latest round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva and the reconvening of the next round of intra-Syrian talks, to be held in, in Geneva. My Special Envoy continues to consult with the Syrian parties as well as regional and international stakeholders on preparations for the talks and the holding of further technical consultations with the participants.

Annex

Incidents affecting civilians recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 2017[a]

Rif Dimashq and Damascus governorates

- On 1 May, air strikes hit a surgical hospital in opposition-controlled Hamuriyah, reportedly resulting in the death of three civilians, including one woman and two children.
- On 1 May, air strikes hit a residential area in the opposition-controlled city of Saqba, allegedly killing four male civilians.
- On 1 May, intense air strikes on a residential area in opposition-controlled Irbin reportedly killed one male civilian and injured an unknown number of others, including women and children.
- On 2 May, a Syrian Palestinian civilian died after he was allegedly hit by a sniper, on 29 April, in Government-controlled Hajar al-Aswad.
- On 4 May, a journalist working for opposition-backed outlets was allegedly shot in the Government-controlled area of Qabun by a sniper.
- On 14 May, ground-based strikes hit opposition-controlled Abbadah, allegedly killing one male civilian.
- On 14 May, ground-based strikes hit opposition-controlled Ash'ari, reportedly killing one male civilian.
- On 16 May, several ground-based strikes hit a residential area in opposition-controlled Hamuriyah, allegedly resulting in the death of four civilians, including two girls and one woman, in addition to the injury of more than 25 others, including women and children.
- On 22 May, a ground-based strike hit a residential area in the vicinity of a market in the opposition-controlled area of Abbadah, reportedly killing at least one male civilian and injuring an unknown number of others.
- On 25 May, one male civilian was allegedly shot dead by a sniper as he was attempting to leave the Hajar al-Aswad area near a Government checkpoint.

Dar'a governorate

- On 2 May, an improvised explosive device detonated on the road between the opposition-controlled areas of Busra al-Hariri and Nahtah. The explosion reportedly resulted in the death of four Civil Defence members.
- On 3 May, ground-based strikes hit opposition-controlled Dar'a al-Balad, reportedly killing one civilian.

[a] In line with resolution 2258 (2015), the present description of developments on the ground, and the incidents during the month that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been able to corroborate, relates to compliance with resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) by all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. The information is provided without prejudice to the work of the Task Force on the Cessation of Hostilities of the International Syria Support Group. The reporting is not a comprehensive listing of all violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law that took place in the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period.

- On 3 May, an improvised explosive device exploded in an opposition-controlled area on the road between Musayfirah and Eastern Karak, allegedly killing two civilians.
- On 5 May, air strikes hit opposition-controlled Ibta' city, reportedly killing a child.
- On 5 May, ground-based strikes hit opposition-controlled Dar'a al-Balad, resulting in the alleged death of one male civilian.
- On 17 May, ground-based strikes hit the opposition-controlled city of Muzayrib, reportedly killing one male civilian.
- On 18 May, ground-based strikes hit the Government-controlled residential areas of Kashif and Matar in Dar'a city. One strike reportedly hit a school and allegedly killed seven children, four of them girls, and injured at least 25 civilians, including 10 women and 5 children.
- On 18 May, an improvised explosive device exploded in the fields south of Dar'a city, reportedly killing one child.
- On 22 May, ground-based strikes hit residential areas of Government-controlled Sahhari neighbourhood in Dar'a, allegedly killing one woman.
- On 23 May, an improvised explosive device detonated on the outskirts of Jallayn, reportedly killing a male civilian from Tafas.

Aleppo governorate

- On 3 May, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated near the interim Government building in I'zaz town, reportedly killing five civilians, including two Iraqi refugees.
- On 8 May, an air strike hit a vehicle traveling in the village of Rasm al-Falih, located near Maskanah. At least 16 civilians were allegedly killed, including 7 women and 3 children.
- On 9 May, air strikes hit residential areas in Rasm al-Falih, reportedly killing five children from the same family.
- On 10 May, helicopters are reported to have dropped bombs on residential areas of Samumah village near Maskanah, allegedly killing at least 14 civilians, including 8 children and 1 woman.

Idlib governorate

- On 3 May, air strikes hit a camp for internally displaced persons in opposition-controlled rural Jisr al-Shughur, reportedly killing a girl and injuring an unknown number of other civilians.
- On 13 May, a male civilian was reportedly killed when an improvised explosive device detonated in Sarmin.

Hama governorate

- On 2 May, air strikes hit residential areas in opposition-controlled Lataminah city, reportedly killing seven civilians from the same family, including five children and their mother.
- On 3 May, air strikes hit residential areas in Lataminah city, reportedly killing a 14-year-old girl.

- On 8 May, air strikes hit an agricultural area in Lataminah city, resulting in the alleged killing of one civilian.
- On 14 May, a 14-year-old child was reportedly killed when an unexploded ordnance exploded in Lataminah city.
- On 15 May, air strikes hit residential areas in ISIL-held Suha village in rural Uqayribat, allegedly killing two children and injuring an unknown number of civilians.
- On 16 May, air strikes hit a convoy of vehicles transporting civilians in Suha, reportedly killing at least 15 civilians, including women and children, and injuring an unknown number of others.
- On 17 May, ground-based strikes hit residential areas in Lataminah city, reportedly killing a 13-year-old girl and injuring an unknown number of civilians.
- On 18 May, ISIL fighters reportedly raided the Government-controlled village of Aqarib north-east of Salamiyah, resulting in the deaths of 36 civilians, including 19 children and 9 women. While many of the civilians were killed in the crossfire, a number of them were reportedly shot or had their throats cut by ISIL fighters. Dozens of other civilians were injured in the incident.
- On 18 May, ground-based strikes repeatedly hit Government-controlled Salamiyah, striking residential areas, a market and an electricity station. Two male civilians were reportedly killed and an estimated seven civilians injured in the incidents.
- On 18 May, air strikes hit residential areas of Lataminah city, allegedly killing a 13-year-old girl and injuring an unknown number of civilians.
- On 21 May, ground-based strikes hit Salamiyah, reportedly killing one male civilian and injuring at least three others, including two children and a woman.
- Around 21 May, air strikes hit ISIL-held Uqayribat in eastern rural Hama, allegedly killing eight civilians from the same family, including four women and one child.
- On 26 May, air strikes hit residential areas in ISIL-held Hamadah village in rural Uqayribat, reportedly killing three male civilians and injuring others.
- On 28 May, ground-based strikes hit residential areas in Salamiyah, allegedly injuring seven civilians, including six children and an elderly man.

Homs governorate

- On 6 May, ground-based strikes hit residential areas in opposition-controlled Talbisah in northern rural Homs, reportedly killing a child.
- On 10 May, air strikes hit residential areas of ISIL-held Sukhnah east of Tadmur (Palmyra), allegedly killing five women and injuring an unknown number of civilians.
- On 13 May, ground-based strikes hit residential areas in Talbisah, reportedly killing two male civilians.
- On 16 May, air strikes hit residential areas in the opposition-controlled town of Kafr Laha in northern Homs governorate, allegedly killing a female teacher.
- On 23 May, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device exploded near a checkpoint in Zahra' neighbourhood in Homs, reportedly killing four civilians, including two women, and injuring 30 persons.

- On 29 May, ground-based strikes hit a residential area in Government-controlled upper Mukharram town in eastern Homs, reportedly killing four civilians from the same family, including a mother and her child.

Dayr al-Zawr governorate

- On 8 May, ground-based strikes hit Qusur and Jurah neighbourhoods in Government-controlled Dayr al-Zawr city, allegedly killing four civilians, including three children, and injuring at least another two.
- On 10 May, air strikes hit residential areas of Sur village in northern Dayr al-Zawr governorate, reportedly killing at least eight civilians, including four children, and injuring six other civilians.
- On 14 May, ground-based strikes hit houses in Qusur neighbourhood in Dayr al-Zawr and reportedly killed seven civilians.
- On 15 May, air strikes hit two areas in ISIL-controlled Albu Kamal city in eastern Dayr al-Zawr, allegedly killing at least 59 civilians (eight of whom were Iraqi refugees), including 16 children and 12 women, and injuring no less than 70 others. Three strikes hit close to Ar-Rahman mosque area, and soon thereafter six strikes hit the houses of civilians in the densely-populated Hajjanah area of the city. Most of the casualties were reported in Hajjanah area. The United States-led coalition stated in its public reporting that on the same day, it had conducted two strikes, which destroyed three ISIL well heads near Albu Kamal.
- On 16 May, ISIL fighters in Albu Kamal allegedly cut the throats of eight men — four each at the 2 locations where air strikes had hit in the city the previous day — stating that the men were killed for providing the coordinates for the strikes.
- On 18 May, unmanned aerial vehicles reportedly dropped bombs on the Government-controlled neighbourhood of Harabish in Dayr al-Zawr city, allegedly killing at least 11 civilians, including 4 children and 3 women, and injuring more than 20 other civilians. Those killed and wounded were attending a wedding ceremony that was taking place in the area.
- On 19 May, a small group of ISIL fighters entered the Syrian Democratic Forces-controlled village of Albu Shams in western rural Dayr al-Zawr governorate and reportedly killed at least 28 civilians, including a woman and her daughter; they were reportedly shot at close range. An unknown number of other civilians were reported missing.
- On 22 May, air strikes hit residential buildings in ISIL-controlled neighbourhood of Kinamat in Dayr al-Zawr city and reportedly killed seven civilians, including four women, and injured at least 20 others. The United States-led coalition stated in its public reporting that on the same day, it had conducted five strikes, which destroyed four ISIL oil trucks, three ISIL pump jacks and an ISIL well head near Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 23 May, ground-based strikes hit Jurah neighbourhood in Dayr al-Zawr city and allegedly killed at least four civilians, including a woman.
- On 24 May, air strikes hit several locations in Mayadin city and reportedly killed at least 11 civilians, including 4 children and 2 women, and injured at least nine others.
- On 24 May, air strikes hit residential areas in Muhaymidah village in western Dayr al-Zawr and allegedly killed two children and injured two other civilians.

- On 25 May, air strikes hit Mayadin city within the vicinity of the Saraya roundabout near the court building, reportedly killing a five-year-old boy in addition to three other civilians, one of them a woman.
- On 26 May, further air strikes in Mayadin hit two buildings, one of them the municipality building, where families of ISIL fighters were reportedly based. At least 100 civilians, 40 or more of them children, were allegedly killed.
- On 30 May, ground-based strikes hit Albu Kamal, reportedly killing three civilians, including a woman and her granddaughter.

Raqqah governorate

- On 7 May, air strikes hit two residential buildings in Hay al-Thalith neighbourhood in then ISIL-controlled Tabaqah city in western Raqqah governorate, reportedly killing at least 21 civilians, including 8 children and 4 women and injuring dozens of others. The United States-led coalition stated in its public reporting that on the same day, it had conducted two strikes that engaged ISIL tactical units and destroyed a fighting position near Tabaqah.
- On 8 May, a child and another civilian were allegedly killed when air strikes hit their home in Dibsi Afnan village in the western part of the governorate.
- On 9 May, air strikes hit residential areas in ISIL-controlled Salihiyah village in eastern Raqqah governorate, reportedly killing 11 civilians, including 6 women and 2 children, and injuring at least nine other civilians.
- On 14 May, air strikes hit two vehicles transporting farm workers, many of them women, working in cotton fields in Akarshah village in the eastern part of the governorate, reportedly resulting in the killing of 23 civilians, including 17 women, and injuring five other civilians, including two women.
- On 21 May, air strikes hit residential buildings in Kudayran village in western Raqqah governorate and allegedly killed at least 14 civilians, 3 of them children, as well as injuring another 20 civilians.
- On 23 May, two children and their father were reportedly killed when an improvised explosive device detonated in the rural Syrian Democratic Forces-controlled Mazra'at Hittin village in northern Raqqah governorate.
- On 23 May, air strikes hit residential areas in Barudah village in the western part of the governorate, reportedly killing 16 civilians, including 4 women and 6 children from the same family, and injuring at least seven other civilians.
- On 23 May, two civilians, a woman and her husband, were allegedly killed when an improvised explosive device detonated in Hay al-Thani neighbourhood in Tabaqah city, western rural Raqqah.
- On 24 May, two civilians, a man and his child, were reportedly killed in Hay al-Thani area of Tabaqah when an improvised explosive device detonated in the vicinity.
- On 24 May, air strikes hit residential areas in Dibsi Faraj and Dibsi Afnan in the western parts of the governorate, allegedly killing two women and injuring another two.
- On 27 May, air strikes hit a home in Raqqah city, reportedly killing at least six civilians from one family, including a girl, and injuring three other civilians.

Hasakah governorate

- On 2 May, an improvised explosive device detonated in the proximity of a checkpoint controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces at the Rajm al-Salibi screening site for internally displaced persons in southern Hasakah. The operation was followed by heavy armed clashes between the Forces and ISIL fighters. At least 19 civilians, including women and children, were reportedly killed in the crossfire and 18 others injured, including at least 4 women and 4 children.

- On 21 May, air strikes hit residential areas in Ruwayyih village in southern Hasakah governorate, reportedly killing at least seven civilians, including two women, and injuring another five civilians.